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The Greening of Montgomery

Requiring Energy Star home construction standards is another small step toward saving the planet.

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MONTGOMERY COUNTY is part of a merry and growing band of localities and states tired of waiting for federal leadership on climate change. It has pledged to cut greenhouse gas emissions 80 percent by 2050. To help meet that ambitious target, the County Council passed seven global-warming bills last month. One of them requires that new-home construction meet the [Environmental Protection Agency's](#) Energy Star standards. This will add to the price of a house, but the long-term savings and positive environmental impact will be worth it.

requirement that all new-home construction in the county meet "Energy Star" standards set by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The aggressive proposal was one of 25 initiatives pushed by council member [Roger Berliner](#) (D-Potomac-Bethesda) and passed on Earth Day. Residents who retrofit their homes with energy-saving solar and geothermal devices would be eligible for a \$250 tax credit. Home sellers would be required to show potential buyers the oil, gas and electric bills from the previous year. The county government convoy of SUVs would be eliminated unless the use of some could be justified. One measure would switch the county's fleet of diesel cars to biofuels. Considering the impact ethanol has had on the environment and food prices, we urge [Montgomery County](#) to explore alternatives.

The crown jewel of the legislation is the Energy Star provision for new homes. It wouldn't kick in until January 2010, and it would apply to single-family homes of four stories or fewer and to townhouses. Commercial and multi-family residential buildings taller than four stories -- that covers most of the affordable housing in the county -- already have to secure a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating, considered the gold standard of green building.

Following Energy Star guidelines, where everything from the appliances to the windows and doors are designed for energy efficiency, will add anywhere from \$2,000 to \$20,000 to the price of a home. In a county where the average sale price for a new home is \$1.1 million, a little extra to help save the planet shouldn't break the bank. And a home constructed to use less energy will save the owner over time. According to Mr. Berliner, a 4,000-square-foot home (the county average) built following the guidelines would use 5,523 fewer kilowatt hours a year than a new home that was not. That translates to a \$1,236 savings annually on the electric bill alone.

County Executive [Isiah Leggett](#) (D) is expected to give the ambitious bills his approval. Fighting global warming is neither easy nor cheap. But getting started now, when the cost increases are relatively manageable and the technology is available, is far preferable to waiting until the planet is a boil.

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